

## Case Report

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# Approaches in response to the need of enhanced data financing during COVID-19: The example of the Palestinian Central Bureau of Statistics

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The COVID-19 pandemic has resulted in serious and prolonged disruptions to the National Statistical Systems worldwide, both in developing and developed countries. The pandemic's pervasive impacts, which have affected almost every part of our communities, continue to unfold, leaving profound marks on financing for development data and statistics that are expected to last for several years after the pandemic has ended.

At the onset of the COVID-19 pandemic, financing for development data and statistics was already in a critical condition. The global response to the economic and social impacts of the COVID-19 pandemic were unprecedented. COVID-19 brought more importance to data to respond quickly to its impact and greater amount of current data are re-used in a more productive response manner where relevant tools for data collection are being developed.

Huge volumes of data are pledged, committed and mobilized by various national and international organizations through a variety of funding instruments; however, an accurate and comprehensive understanding of the extent and detail of the response is difficult. Data on these activities are collected through a variety of systems for different purposes and different ways of describing financial flows that may operate over different time frames.

Development data and statistics are critical for policy making and planning and for monitoring and measuring progress towards the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs), and it's even more relevant now after the COVID-19 pandemic. To achieve the SDGs goals as initial expected, even more and better-targeted funding is needed for National Statistical Systems (NSS) to produce accurate; timely; and relevant data to make policies and develop critical strategies; especially, in developing countries where statistical systems are often under-resourced and Palestine was no exception.

The Dubai Declaration, announced at the UN World Data Forum in 2018 and endorsed by the UN Statistical Commission at its 50<sup>th</sup> session in March 2019, calls for the establishment of a funding mechanism to mobilize domestic and international funds to strengthen the capacity of national data and statistical systems. The Dubai Declaration recognizes that innovative funding strategies are critical for successful implementation of the CTGAP.

Moreover, the Cape Town Global Action Plan for Sustainable Development Data (CTGAP), adopted by the UN Statistical Commission and welcomed by the UN General Assembly in 2017, identifies strategic areas that need strengthening and serves as a framework for investment. For this purpose, the Bern Network which

is an open, multi-stakeholder alliance to support the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development by promoting more and better financing for data is currently developing the Clearinghouse on Financing Development Data, which will provide information on data supply and demand in order to build new partnerships, bring projects to scale, and access best practices. The clearing house portal shall be launched in the upcoming UNWDF of 2021 in Bern, Switzerland.

Moreover, the recently launched 53<sup>rd</sup> United Nation Statistical commission emphasis clearly on the importance of funding for data and statistics especially since the pandemic has caused priorities to shift and marginalized groups to be prone to being left behind, find ways to address challenges in a way to build on the lessons learned and sister's organizations experiences, use of social media as a main tool to educate public and strengthen collaboration with data ecosystem to better identify and respond to their needs and to invest in data governance to access relevant timely and quality data.

“Decision 15d: Requested that the new UN data portal be based on interoperability standards for the automated data and metadata exchange, including in particular SDMX, and support the use of modern data validation, analytics and visualization tools, while considering efficiency and cost effectiveness;”

Decision 15f “Stressed the need for continuous investment, especially in training and capacity building for the use of modern digital technologies, including for IT security, in international agencies, countries and all participating partner entities, in order to ensure the sustainability of the UN data portal”

Accurate and timely data is crucial to understanding the effects of such crisis on vulnerable sectors; thus, National Statistical Systems need to focus on investment in administrative records, data stewardship, open data and modernization including making use of new data sources like big data, data interoperability, innovation, and investing in new technologies for collecting and processing different statistics as well as strengthening networking and partnership with different stakeholders.

In today's world, these issues were important but now there are now even more crucial and urgent issues including poverty, education, access to health care, access to vaccines, high unemployment rates, and deterioration of the economy to assure moving in the right track in a situation that touch National Statistical Systems, and also it changed its reality in towards improving it and leaving no one behind.

It is now vital for National Statistical Systems to establish a long-term path to sustainable financing for development data and statistics. Palestinian Central Bureau of Statistics (PCBS) is trying to tackle this change though following certain steps including: partnership approach versus donor/funder approach (more involvement, ownership, etc.), attract and engage private/academic and research community as main stakeholders, modernization through data stewardship, enhancing the cooperation and the coordination between the national and international organizations (partners, sister organizations), system relevancy versus project relevancy, increasing trust among the data users and producers (statistical calendar, social responsibility, school competition; Joint event), increasing the efficiency of utilizing the available resources, investing in preparing the long, medium and short term strategies (Continuous Monitoring), increasing the reliance on the administrative records and central registers and increasing statistical awareness through using different tools and means (Social media, workshops, data visualization).

In response to the pandemic, PCBS worked on a Response Plan in which merger of some activities was done to save cost and effort. We relied on administrative data wherever possible to make up for field data collection halt. We shifted to electronic data collection and publications rather than paper publications as much as possible as well as in-house design. Most importantly we worked on maintaining and boosting communication with our partners including donors to raise funding to urgent surveys including the rapid assessment of the pandemic on socio-economic conditions and businesses.

*I think it's vital* to strengthen the evidence base on the value of investing in data, challenge donor behavior and build consensus around a new way of doing business that is driven by practical needs at the country level and advocate for more financing by exploring how to put a stronger emphasis on data in existing and new financing instruments, and seeking new sources of financing.

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